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BOOK REVIEW

Ernst-Albrecht Plieg, *Dos Memelland, 1920-1939: Deutsche Auto-nomiebestrebungen im litauischen Gesamtstaat* (Wuerzburg : Holz-ner Verlag, 1962).

It could probably be said that the Memel Area (Klaipėdos kraštas) is no longer an intensely disputed region. When the Allies divided Germany in 1945 into four occupational zones, German territory was based on the frontiers of December 31, 1937. This date was officially referred to by the Federal Republic of Germany in defining German territorial rights. No claims going beyond the frontiers of 1937 were registered, although from a legal standpoint the Memel Area might have been included. The return of the Memel Area into the Reich in 1939 was based on a formal treaty between Germany and Lithuania, but the Allies considered it simply another breach of the Versailles Peace Treaty. However, the *Memelland* continues to have a special — perhaps somewhat nostalgic — appeal to the German people. This may be the *raison d'être* for Ernst-Albrecht Plieg's book.

This well-researched work represents a considerable effort to set the record straight concerning German endeavors for autonomy in the Memel Area. It is the expanded version of a dissertation presented at Bonn University in 1960, appearing as volume 19 of the *Marburger Ostforschungen*. The political developments in the Memel Area are covered from the time of its separation from the German *Reich* through the period of its autonomous status under Lithuanian sovereignty up to its reincorporation in March 1939. The author introduces his book as a contribution to the nationalities problem; he sees the issues and difficulties as quite akin to those faced by national minorities in other parts of Europe following World War I, as the tragic consequences of the well intended application of the self-determination doctrine.

The volume is based on a thorough examination of a wealth of newly accessible German diplomatic documents, of which the files of the Merael *Landtag* (provincial diet) and the reports and correspondence of the German Mission in Kaunas and those of the German Consulate General in Memel are particularly prominent. Considerable use is also made of published materials and Me-melland newspapers. The events are reconstructed in chronological order, starting with the Allied Condominium, moving on to the military capture by Lithuania and the establishment of the Memel *Landtag* in 1925. The majority of chapters deal with the different directorates of the *Landtag* and the increasingly more intense political currents toward genuine autonomy, necessitating the intervention of the signatory powers to the Memel Convention by 1935.

One chapter is devoted to the National-Socialist influences. In the author's assessment, the Nazi activities did not have a decisive political impact because of the intense rivalry between two separate parties, the *Christlich-Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (Christian-Socialist Association) and the *Sozialistische Volksgemeinschaft* (Socialist Peoples Association), and the absence of a direct connection of either with the NSDAP in Germany. Lithuania moved against both Nazi-oriented parties and put their leaders on trial in Kaunas for treasonous activities against the Lithuanian state. This event is treated by the author as having been of great significance in alienating the German population. The return of the area to Germany on March 22, 1939, is seen as the natural culmination of events as transcribed by the author. In reference to the above, he remarks that the German protocol reflecting the negotiations between Ribbentrop and Urbsys which led to the official return represents the only authentic account and does not have any characteristics of an ultimatum, as is commonly suggested. A comparison, therefore, with the events that had ensued in Czechoslovakia just a few days earlier is seen as entirely inappropriate.

The author concludes that the return of the *Memelland* to Germany was the result of the total bankruptcy of the Lithuanian Memel policy. To him the evidence leaves no doubt that the return was favored by a great majority of the people, who had grown hostile to Lithuanian governmental policies. Where there was initial willingness to compromise and cooperate, opposition to Lithuanian sovereignty gradually hardened in response to essentially unwarranted interventions. The author is fully aware that there exist substantially different assessments of the situation. Indeed, he notes in his introduction that his reason for going over the events and political developments in the Memelland again when others did so before him is because these treatments he considers as too one-sided. Unfortunately, one has the feeling that this work is not exactly free from another type of partiality.

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